

NEWS

Depot firefighters suit up for HAZMAT training



Lance Cpl. Justin J. Shemanski

A Depot firefighter works to cap off a simulated canister leak during HAZMAT training at the Parris Island Fire Department Monday. The firefighters go through this one-day refresher course annually.

LANCE CPL.
JUSTIN J. SHEMANSKI
STAFF WRITER

To the untrained eye, it may have looked like something out of a science-fiction movie. But in reality, Depot firefighters donned their blue suits and oxygen tanks to participate in Hazardous Materials training at the Parris Island Fire Department Monday and Tuesday.

As part of their rigorous schedule of annual training, the firefighters went through a day of classroom refreshers and HAZMAT simulations to ensure they are ready to handle any situation.

“Every year, firefighters aboard the Depot go through a whole day of HAZMAT exercises and simulations,” said Tim Daly, instructor with the University of Maryland School of Fire and Rescue. “The first half of the day is classroom-type activities, and then they actually go out and do practice drills in the suits. A lot of money is invested in this equipment so it’s important for them to know how to use it correctly and safely.”

One of the simulated scenarios was an overturned canister reported to possibly contain hazardous materials.

“After the incident was called in, we had a couple firefighters get into the safety suits and take their equipment out to the site,” said Daly. “They set up a quarantine area and then worked to seal the canister.”

“Our main mission on Parris Island is to protect the recruits, civilian workers and [family members]. So this is something else we have in our arsenal if the need arises.”

- Capt. Ralph Stanley, PIFD lead firefighter

After handling hazardous materials, the firefighters must then go through a decontamination process.

“To make sure the firefighters don’t come into contact with any hazardous residue that may be present on their suits, they go through decontamination,” Daly said. “An area is set up where they go through a series of water sprinklers and are scrubbed with brushes by other firefighters.”

One of the most important things done after the suit is washed is for the firefighter to get a blood pressure reading.

“They will get a reading before and after,” Daly said. “This is to see the effects on their stress levels before and after they perform in a situation with hazardous materials. We want to try to get them used to these situations so their levels stay the same, before and after a call. So when something real comes up, it will be no sweat to them ... it will come second nature and they will have nothing to worry about.”

These types of simulations are a welcome addition to the daily training the Depot firefighters go through.

“It’s very important to keep up on training like this,” said Capt. Ralph Stanley, PIFD lead firefighter. “There are constant changes in equipment and methods of doing things, so it’s nice to be on top of things like this.”

In addition to the yearly course, the Depot firefighters hold regular HAZMAT training two hours each month.

“We like to get in training among ourselves to make sure we all know each other’s job,” said Stanley. “That way, if something comes up and one of us can’t make it for any reason, that firefighter’s job will be covered.”

Stanley also believes the training is good to know because of possible terrorism targets on Parris Island.

“Our main mission on Parris Island is to protect the recruits, civilian workers, and [family members],” he said. “So this is something else we have in our arsenal if the need arises. We want to keep up on this training - nobody wants to be caught in any situation unprepared.”

Save A Life Tour improves health

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In an effort to make a healthier, safer Parris Island, the Save A Life Tour, in conjunction with Semper Fit Health Promotions, teamed up with Marine Corps Community Services - South Carolina, Single Marine Program, and Beaufort Memorial Hospital to hold the Save A Life Tour and Health Fair at the Depot Lyceum Tuesday.

The event, which was open to all Depot personnel, focused on National Alcohol Awareness Month.

“The Save A Life Tour was an event that allowed an individual to experience first hand the devastating effects of driving under the influence of alcohol,” said Crystal Dillard, registered nurse and Semper Fit health promotions director. “The Save A Life Tour is an event coordinated through

Gayle Wierzbicki. She invited Semper Fit to assist with the event and we decided to offer a health fair as well.”

Wierzbicki, the drug demand reduction coordinator for the Tri-Command area, was asked to help set up the event.

“This is the first time the Save A Life Tour has come to a military base,” said Wierzbicki. “They primarily tour college campuses and high schools, so we thought this would be very worthwhile opportunity for them to come out to Parris Island and MCAS to educate the military.”

The Save A Life Tour was here for a two-day tour at Parris Island and MCAS Beaufort to educate the military on the hazards of mixing alcohol and driving.

To let patrons experience the effects first hand, a simulator was set up to show them the difficulties of driving while intoxicated.

“Our main goal here is to

increase the awareness of driving after consuming alcohol,” said Wierzbicki. “We want to let people know that even after just one drink, it’s still not wise to get behind the wheel. One drink is enough to hinder your ability to be a safe driver and the decision to drive could cost someone their life. Our message is if you choose to drink - drink responsibly.”

Although Wierzbicki’s main focus is drug prevention, she feels that alcohol awareness is just as important.

“As the DDRC, drugs are, of course, my main focus, but alcohol is considered a drug, even though it’s legal,” said Wierzbicki. “We consider it a gateway drug. People who are abusers are more prone to get into heavier drugs when under the influence of alcohol.”

Several health professionals were on hand to offer free information on stress management, STD/HIV education, personal nutrition and many

other facts one could use to lead a healthier life. Physical fitness was also an issue during the event.

“We had approximately 20 health experts come in from Naval Hospital Beaufort and BMH’s Mobile Wellness Unit to provide health screenings and to address about ten health related topics,” said Dillard.

Both military and civilians took full advantage of the event, browsing through each display, picking up bits and pieces of information to educate them on ways to better their health. The volunteers at each table readily answered any questions they had.

“Everybody needs information,” said Lance Cpl. Kenny West, warehouseman at Bucket Issue. “There’s really no better way to get it out there than by how they’re doing it now. I’ve found out a lot of new things that I can pass on to my family to make them safer.”